

Tracey Lawrence Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

There are two things in this world that we can be sure of: one is that Rock will never die, and the other is that *The Goon Show* will live for ever. Both immortals were in the house in 'The Rhubarb Society' at Tracey Lawrence this autumn, which took its title from a 1956 *Goon Show* skit where a group murmuring, 'rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb' over and over again in order to create a 'realistic' crowd sound are called to order as The Rhubarb Society. The show's curators, John Pilson and Kathy Slade, brought together five international artists to create a rather eccentric club of practitioners interested in popular culture, visual art and language's intrinsic relationship to them.

Jonathan Middleton's *Record of the Undead* (2006) is a 12-inch vinyl record (which visitors listened to via the intimacy of earphones), presenting an unholy coupling of two of horror's most favoured tropes - the vampire and the zombie. *Side (Vampire)* is a stereo recording of the standard 4/4 Rock drum beat. Familiar in its simplicity, secure in its repetition, the beat's appearance here lulls us into a false sense of security through its steady rhythm. *Side (Zombie)* is a mono recording of a digitally produced 60 Hz sine wave, the same frequency and shape of wave as common AC electricity used in North America. The odd comfort of ambient electricity here is used to good effect to simulate the insistent presence of zombies: undead, unsleeping, always on.

New York-based artist Anne Collier's sparsely elegant 2005 C-type print of a cassette tape is strangely soothing, despite being labelled 'Side 1: Problems'. This evocative pop referent is instantly recognizable to anyone born before 1984, and Collier has transformed its once quotidian physicality as everyday object into a bronzed icon of a time now past by isolating its flawed materialism (that is, as the once preferred method of recording music from the radio, among other uses). The presence of this cultural relic is sad but proud, for even though cassettes have been largely superseded as a means of distribution, *Problems* demonstrates that through iconography old habits sometimes die hard.

Seven British actresses perform a polyphonic version of the opening monologue of David Mamet's play *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) in *The London Cast* (2005), by John Pilson. Their performance appears impromptu, almost for fun, as they slouch on a sofa, drinking booze, and reading from their scripts. Through careful editing the actresses' voices jar but somehow blend to render their own competing version of a monologue that is itself saturated with the highly competitive, macho vernacular of American property dealers. Interpretation is an obvious concern here, both from the performers' perspective and from the viewer's. 'Always be closing' is *Glengarry Glen Ross*' motto and leitmotiv; however, *The London Cast* is an aggregate of stylistic mannerisms, and such a cyclical enterprise makes for dense reading.

Kathy Slade
Set List Samplers:
Destroyer (Daniel Bejar)
2006
Embroidery on canvas
65x55 cm

Crystal Coenby
Euro Oils
Old Man
Painter
Modern Paint
~~Artist~~
Airplane
Rabies
Lookers'
Crossover



John Pilson
The London Cast
2006
Video still

'Set List Samplers' is an ongoing series of stitched works embroidered on canvas, which mutates the private set lists of bands into public works through a recognizable mode of mass production. Kathy Slade regularly employs machine-stitching as a technique in her work, to reflect on, and to respond to, contemporary notions of the handmade and its relationship to pop culture. The authorial voice of the musicians is quite distinct in these works; the sampler entitled *Destroyer (Daniel Bejar)* (2006) reads simply enough in form, but with a distinct timbre of impending danger. One song, 'Rabies', has been scored out and written in again after 'Airplane', leaving the singer's audience (both when he is performing the song in its original context and here as viewers in a gallery) to decipher why he as 'author' thinks they should go together in that particular order. Similarly Rodney Graham's set (entitled *Rodney Graham Band (Rodney Graham)*, 2006) has much of the artist's hand about it: laid out graphically, numbered in fact, with the title - *Mexico* - at the top. Of course, looking at the set lists is quite a different experience from hearing them, but some of the phonological residues remain in the reading.

If, as Ezra Pound suggested, 'Fundamental accuracy of statement is the ONE sole morality of writing', then 'The Rhubarb Society' was just about as moral as they come. Its Minimalist attention to detail, tailored within a diversity of presentation, combined to pull into focus the experiential meaning of language within a gallery context.

Maria Fusco



The Rhubarb Society